

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

BRITISH NATION.

Thursday, October 2. 1707.

I Was a going on with my Lamentation about the low Price of Sermons, and the high Price of Plays—When behold I met with this agreeable Interruption, in a Letter from a Friend of mine at London.

Mr. REVIEW,

WE think, that in common Justice you ought to give a publick Notice, when Men reform, at when they grow scandalous; and supposing you willing to do so, we advertise you, that as you justly reprov'd the Gentlemen of the University of Oxford last Year, for their giving Permission and Encouragement to the Players to come down there, and erect their Schools of Debauchery, hand in hand with the Schools of Philosophy and Divinity; so whether they took the Hint from you, or

no, this is certain, that the Players made an Attempt to set up there again this Summer, but have been rejected and driven away by the Heads of the University, and in particular by our Reverend Dr. L—Rer; and for as far as we think you have contributed to such a Reformation, we thank you, &c.

Your Friends.

There is more in the Letter fitter for any Body else to print than my self, and therefore I omit it.

Indeed, Gentlemen of Oxford, I shall ascribe nothing to the Review in this Matter; if I did endeavour to make you blush at a thing so contrary to the very Nature of your Constitution, and the Designs of your worthy,

worthy Founders and Benefactors, and you have blush'd at and reform'd it, 'tis your Honour, and will always by me be acknowledged to your Advantage.

What might not *Oxford* reform'd, and *Oxford* recover'd to Discipline do in the World? And to speak without Respect to Church or Dissenter, really, Gentlemen, there weeds no Distinction here; The Church of *England* gives no more License to Vice by her Constitution, than the strictest Dissenter——There is not the least thing in her Canon to encourage Players, or prompt to Prophaneness; to connive at Lewdness, or encourage prophaneing the Lord's-Day; in short, if you will do these things, you will be Dissenters from the Church, you will be the plainest Non-Conformists, and make the deepest and most practical Schism in the Church.

The Church in all her Establishment has not one Article, that so much as opens the Door to a remis Conversation, and I think my self bound to testify this against you in Behalf of the Church of *England*, tho' in some things I cannot assent and consent; I know nothing in it, that tends to encourage Immoralities; all her Canon, all her Articles, all her Homilies, nay to go farther, all temporal Laws made in her Favour, tend to Reformation of Manners, and to Strictness of Life, to a Sober and Religious Conversation, and if you will but obey your Mother, the Church, you shall merit no Man's Censure.

I bear Witness against you, that when you swear, and are lewd, when drunker and debauch'd, when you encourage Vice and Immoralities, by Play-Houses and obscene Representations, you act against your own Principles, as Church of *England* Men; you fly in the Face of the Ecclesiastical Authority, as well as Civil; you insult your Mother, when you insult your Maker; you dishonour the Church, when you dishonour GOD; and you leave a Scandal not on the Church, for she is clear of your Crime, but of the Profession you make to be related to her, or bound by her.

When therefore, O *Drinkard*, thou drinkest a Health to the Church, and swearest in thy Folly, that thou art a Church of *Eng-*

land Man, *Thou liest, and the Truth is not in Thee*: The Church of *England* knows no such Things, owns no such Practice, seeks no such People, she spues Thee out of her Mouth, and till by Repentance and Reformation thou restorest thy self to her again, thou art no real Member of her, but a wretched Apostate, that callest thy self by her Name, but in Life, Heart and Practice abhorrs her, and is abhorred by her.

Nor are there greater Enemies to the Church of *England* in the World, than those who standing within her Pale, and wearing her Livery, carry that black Mark of Hell in their Faces, that may signify to all the World they are Citizens of *Tophet*, and Fellow Denizens with the Devil.

'Tis the Honour therefore of all those, who profess themselves Members of the Church of *England*, and it is the Debt they owe to the Church, that they should, as she does, proclaim Eternal War with Vice, and never league with Immoralities. 'Tis a monstrous Incongruity in Religion, 'tis Non-sense in the very Words, a lewd Church of *England* Man! A drunken Church of *England* Man! Are These Sons of the Church? They are Sons of the Devil; the Church knows them not, and will deliver them up to justice, even from the Hórus of the Altar.

Take this, Gentlemen of *Oxford*, from a Man you have small Charity for; if you have any Care of the Church, any Love for her Honour, any Concern for her Prosperity, any Regard to the too just Reproaches of her Enemies, abhor what she abhors, dethrone Vice, discourage Immoralities, and especially at the Universities, where her Clergy are initiated, and where they have their Education, where they suck in Principles, and where the first Concoction is formed; Vice and Immorality should not come near your Gates, nor be able to shew their Heads in your Bounds; nay, in Case of Example, you should shun even things lawful, strictly speaking, to avoid the Appearance of these Evils, and shun so much as the Shadow of what is so scandalous to your Government.

But it is not my Province to instruct you, I come now to do you Justice, if it be true, that you have shut out the Players, and prohibited their introducing their last Years Extravagancies among you: you have done like wife Men, like Chistians, like Men qualify'd for Government of others, and like Men who think your Reputation worth preserving——Now, honest Men shall freely commit their Children to your Care, and be no more in Pain for their Morals; they shall no more fetch away their Sons for Fear of their being ruin'd, or in just Apprehensions of their being debauch'd in their very Education.

It must necessarily follow, that if the Clergy were educated in a strict Vertue, and brought up in an exact Discipline, they would be naturally strict Discouragers of the Vices, and Abominations of the Times in the several Parishes, where they shall hereafter be placed: But how should a Student given up to all Manner of Wickedness, become a Teacher of Vertue, or what Effect can his Arguments have without his Example.

I will not say, a Man may not help others to Heaven, that shall never come there himself; or that he may not, like an unskillful Horseman, open the Gate on the wrong Side, let other People thro', and shut himself out; but 'tis not so likely a Man should show me the Way, when he does not know the Way himself.

I need no more repeat the Necessity of Vertue to a Religious Education; I dare say, all the Gentlemen of Oxford will grant it me——I am not speaking of Vertue, as a Religious Act by which we are to be saved, for Negatives will give small Help that way, but I am upon the Matter of Erudition, and I am perswaded, that no Man in Oxford will attempt to defend this Point, *viz. That a Playhouse is necessary in a University.*

I offer my self to dispute with any Gentleman in Oxford upon that Head, allowing me to explain the Terms very briefly, that a Playhouse be understood, as those lately at Oxford, and now in London are circumstanced, and a University be understood a School of Literature, a Nursery of

of Learning, and a Store-house of Divine for the Churches it ought to be.

I shall not deny, that Representations, Actings, and what may so be call'd Plays, may be not only lawful, but expedient in the Exercises of a School——But this then is to be perform'd among themselves, and is so upon publick Days in most Universities, and is under the Regulations of the Masters of the Houses, and agrees not with my Term as explain'd, and much less with the Practice of our modern Comedians.

But if it be not necessary in a University, much less is it for the Honour and Reputation of a Nursery of the Church——Of a Church which in her Constitution is founded upon Vertue and the Seriousness of a Holy Life——A Church that is back'd with innumerable Laws to discourage these very things; to introduce vicious, lewd and scandalous Plays, Interludes and Comedies there, is infecting the very Milk, and by Consequence poisoning the Child.

But Oxford has expelled them, and they are gone; so vanish all the Enemies of Sobriety and good Manners out of this Island; and as the Example is begun, where the Fund of Christian Vertue is erected, I hope it shall in Time be follow'd by the general Consent of the whole Nation, to the Honour of Religion, the Joy of good Men, and the preventing a swift debauching our Posterity.

And whether went the Players now from Oxford——To the Bath say some, tho' I do acknowledge I am not certain; but it puts me in Mind of a Passage, which I observ'd lately in some of our News-Papers, That some People having reported abroad, that the Small-Pox was very frequent in the City of Bath, the Citizens thought it very necessary for them to clear the City of that Slander, and to testify that it was no such thing, that the City was very healthy, and that it was a malicious Report. The Reason is plain, had the City been haunted with that infectious Disease, no Body, that had not had the Small-Pox, would have come near it, and especially those that had Children.

Now

Now were the People half as much concern'd for the Infection of their Morals and Manners, either in themselves or their Posterity, they would be as shy of the Bath when the Players are there, as when the Small-Pox is there.

By Consequence the Citizens of the Bath, when they hear it said, that the Players, who were expell'd at Oxford, are come thither, ought to drive them away too, and carefully publish it in all the News-Papers, that such a Report is false and scandalous, that People may safely come down with their Wives and their Daughters, for that there is no such Infection as that in the City. *Doutronomy*, 5. 29. *O that there were such a Heart in them*—How noble an Example would this be; but Satan binders, and the Humour of the Day is not that Way.

And yet I durst undertake to prove, I don't say, I can make the People at Bath believe it; but I believe it were easie to prove, that were such a reforming Reformation taken at the Bath, they might indeed lose some of their very good Customers, the Rakes, Bullies, Gamesters, Whores, Bauds, &c. But I am perswaded, they would gain infinitely more in the Concourse of sober and substantial Families, who now shun the Place on Account of the Revelling and Rable that are continually there. But to return to the University.

After all, it ought to be acknowledged, that the Masters of Colleges at Oxford have in this new Step made an Advance towards recovering the Reputation of the University, and satisfying the World, that they have some Regard to the Good of those that are committed to their Charge; and if Dr. L——ster has contributed to it, he has acted so as deserves the Thanks and Applause of all good Men; and it had been much to his Praise, had he taken the like Course some Months ago; To which also there hangs a Tale.

Hard is the Fate of this poor Nation, whose Ruin, as to Morals, has ever been begun among those, whose Duty and whole proper Business it is to reclaim and restrain them; and till their Reformation begin there too, I must own, I shall have but small Hopes of it.

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